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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR ONDCP DIRECTOR KERLIKOWSKE

Summary

1. (SBU) Embassy Bogota warmly welcomes the visit of R. Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Your visit comes as Colombia faces new challenges from narcotrafficking groups as well as some political uncertainty. The Colombian Congress has just approved a referendum that opens the door for a possible third term for President Alvaro Uribe. A regional debate over a U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) has heated up. The Government of Colombia (GOC) and the U.S. Embassy are working together to consolidate the successes of Plan Colombia through a new Embassy follow-on strategy -- the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) -- which complements the GOC's National Consolidation Plan (PNC).

2. (SBU) In ten years, Colombia has progressed from a near failed state and terrorist haven to an economic, political and social leader in Latin America. Colombia has made major progress in its fight against illegal armed groups and set records in the eradication and interdiction of drugs. Murder and kidnapping rates have dropped dramatically, while rule of law has strengthened through major judicial reforms. Improved security and economic reform has grown the economy, reduced poverty and attracted record levels of investment. The GOC has looked to leverage these successes beyond its borders by offering troops in Afghanistan and providing counterterrorism and counternarcotics training to Mexican, Panamanian and other law enforcement agencies in the region.

3. (SBU) Significant challenges remain -- especially ongoing drug-fueled crime that has driven large numbers of rural poor from the land, as well as human rights abuses within the military. We hope you will be able to reiterate to the GOC the importance of providing citizen security and social services in marginalized areas, and the need for continued and significant progress on human rights cases. Drug trafficking organizations and illegal armed groups still operate in large parts of the country, including along the border. Colombia has over three million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Inadequate state presence as well as historical social divides still prevent millions of citizens, especially in rural areas, from benefiting fully from security and economic gains. USG support is a critical stimulus to the GOC to confront these persistent challenges, even as we continue our dialogue on how best to transfer key counternarcotics tasks from the USG to the GOC. End Summary.

Democratic Security Advances

14. (SBU) Colombia has achieved successes in its fight against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN) and emerging criminal groups. The rescue of 15 high-profile FARC hostages in July 2008, including three Americans, and the deaths of key FARC leaders highlight Colombia's progress in establishing security. Colombian security forces have captured or killed a number of mid-level FARC leaders and reduced the space in which terrorists can operate freely, undermining their ability to conduct large military operations. The establishment of a basic police presence in all of Colombia's municipalities has also undermined FARC logistics and organization. A record number of FARC members deserted in 2008 -- including mid- and high-level commanders. Total demobilizations of illegal armed groups reached 3,461 in 2008 -- primarily from the FARC -- making it the highest level of demobilizations in Colombia's history. In the first 6 months of 2009, there were a total of 1,371 demobilizations of illegal armed group members.

15. (SBU) With USG help, in 2008, Colombia again set records in eradication and interdiction of drugs, while further reducing murder and kidnapping rates. Colombia extradited a record 208 criminals, narcotraffickers and terrorists to the United States in 2008, including 15 senior ex-paramilitary leaders. Colombia has already extradited more than 145 suspected criminals in 2009. The number of homicides fell for the sixth consecutive year, dropping to 16,140 (or 33 for every 100,000 habitants), 45 percent lower than 2002 levels.

Serious Challenges Ahead

16. (SBU) Despite advances in security and development, challenges related to violence, narcotrafficking, displacement, human rights, labor rights, and minority groups remain. We estimate the FARC still has some 9,000 fighters in the field, using new tactics that include sniper attacks and mines, and organized narcotrafficking groups continue to generate violence. Internal displacement due to the armed conflict remains serious, with more than three million displaced since 1995. Deep historical social divides make it difficult for millions from the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations to benefit fully from security and economic gains. These minority groups suffer from limited education, health care, employment opportunities, and disproportionate forced displacement in the mostly isolated rural areas where they reside.

17. (U) Colombia has taken significant steps to improve its human rights performance, but problems still remain. We hope you will be able to reinforce the human rights message with the GOC leadership. U.S. concerns include extrajudicial executions (murders falsely reported as military combat kills), threats against human rights defenders, and illegal surveillance of the government's political opponents, including Supreme Court magistrates, politicians, and NGOs. Fifty-one members of the Colombian military were dismissed in 2008 due to alleged involvement in extrajudicial killings, but impunity for such abuses remains a serious problem. We are working with the Ministry of Defense to improve rules of engagement, and make sure that soldiers accused of human rights abuses are investigated by civilian prosecutors. Homicides of labor unionists declined 76% between 2001-2008, yet in 2008 the number of labor homicides (for all causes) increased from 39 to 46. Still, the murder rate for unionists is well below the national homicide rate. As of August 2009, 24 murders of unionists have been reported this year by union sources. In 2008, the GOC reestablished a government presence in all 1,098 municipalities and all the country's mayors once again resided within their municipalities.

Regional Tensions Flare

18. (SBU) A Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the United States and Colombia is almost ready for signature and would provide U.S. access to seven Colombian military installations to facilitate cooperation to combat narcotrafficking and other transnational crimes within Colombia. The DCA updates existing agreements that date back to 1952, and would not increase the U.S. military footprint in Colombia. Nevertheless, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, joined by leaders from Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina, reacted to news of the negotiations with harsh complaints over an increased U.S. military presence in the region. President Uribe

traveled to seven South American nations and explained to counterparts that the DCA would benefit the region as it addresses narcotrafficking. A special summit of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) convened in Argentina on August 28 to address the controversy -- yielding mixed results. While President Uribe was able to prevent the group from condemning the DCA, many South American presidents expressed reservations about the regional implications of the agreement. UNASUR ministers of defense and foreign affairs met September 15 in Quito to again address regional tensions. Some aspects of the DCA are sensitive with the Colombian public, such as the treatment of immunities for defense contractors.

Uribe Third Term

¶9. (SBU) Your visit comes as the Constitutional Court analyzes a recent law that would authorize a referendum on whether the Constitution should be amended to allow President Uribe to run for a third term in the May 2010 elections. His possible re-election has become the touchstone of all Colombian politics this year. Indeed, you will find that your interlocutors are focused on the short timeframe remaining in the second term given the uncertainty over the third. If the referendum goes forward, at least 25 percent of registered voters, or 7.3 million Colombians, must participate and a majority of them must vote favorably. President Obama told President Uribe on June 29 that, in the United States' experience, two terms is enough for any leader, though he emphasized that the final decision belongs to the Colombian people.

Congressional Elections and Political Reform

¶10. (U) Congressional elections will also occur next March, two months ahead of the presidential election. The 2006-10 Congress has been rocked by a parapolitical scandal in which 86 legislators were investigated for links to paramilitaries. In response, Congress passed a political reform this year that seeks to punish politicians and political parties for collaboration with narcotraffickers and illegally armed groups. The reform expressly bans anyone who has been condemned of crimes relating to narcotrafficking, illegally armed groups, or crimes against humanity from holding office. It also creates sanctions and fines for political parties who have such candidates. Most importantly, political parties will now lose the seat held by the offending politician -- previously, the party simply replaced the offender with another candidate from the party's candidate list.

DAS to be Dismantled

¶11. (U) President Uribe announced on September 17 that he favored dismantling the wiretapping scandal-ridden Administrative Department of Security (DAS), the civilian security service. In a much-anticipated move, Uribe proposed a much smaller, new entity that would focus on intelligence and immigration services. The DAS' other functions would be transferred to other existing agencies. DAS scandals have included their wiretapping of Supreme Court Magistrates, opposition politicians, and non-governmental organizations. The Colombian Congress is expected to pass a law authorizing Uribe to re-organize the DAS.

Economic Limitations

¶12. (SBU) Reacting to the economic slowdown in 2009, the GOC cut the national budget by \$1.4 billion, including a \$190 million reduction to the defense budget. The proposal would likely reduce future expenditures on ammunition, rifles, communications equipment, infrastructure projects, fuel, food, and uniforms. The cuts would not directly affect defense expenditures funded by the wealth tax, which is expected to raise approximately \$3.7 billion between 2007-2011. Still, the GOC's ability to sustain current levels of defense spending after 2011 could be in jeopardy if the wealth tax is left to expire at the end of 2010. The Colombian Congress is presently deliberating on a bill to extend the wealth tax through 2013. Funding for social programs, critical to addressing many of the catalysts for the conflict, will be sustained, according to President Uribe. Proposed increases for

social programs, however, will be put on hold until government revenues increase.

Post-Plan Colombia Initiatives

¶13. (U) To consolidate the gains of Plan Colombia and to address the linked challenges of inadequate state presence and lack of development in drug production areas, the Embassy developed the multi-agency Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI), which supports Colombia's own National Consolidation Plan (PNC). The CSDI team is initially focusing on three priority areas of on-going conflict, drug trafficking and social marginalization in order to help establish state presence in these strategic, under-governed parts of the country. The plan is centered on increasing the government's territorial control to provide security for communities; to achieve permanent eradication; to transfer public order and protection responsibilities to the police; and to provide a wide range of socio-economic services. CSDI's core assumption is that security is the precondition for development, which gives communities a stake in the long term future of their region -- the surest way to sustaining security among marginalized rural and vulnerable populations.

Tumaco, Key Consolidation Zone

¶14. (SBU) You will be visiting Tumaco, Narino, one of the three CSDI priority zones and an area critical to USG counternarcotics efforts. In recent decades, the municipality of Tumaco has been a battleground between the FARC, paramilitaries and GOC forces. Today, organized criminal bands (BACRIMs) are fighting to control lucrative drug routes to Mexico. The area's long, inaccessible coastline is ideal for trafficking, and the largely uncontrolled land border with Ecuador is a transit region for drugs and precursor chemicals. The main cash crop in the region has been coca and the main industry the production of cocaine. According to UN figures, the municipality has by far the highest coca cultivation in the country at 5,865 hectares. The Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) has sprayed an average of 50,000 hectares of coca annually in Narino since 2004.

¶15. (SBU) Widespread violence in the countryside is driving internally displaced persons to the port city of Tumaco, which has one of the highest murder rates in the country -- over 80 killings were reported in the first three months of this year, mostly drug-related. Municipal and community leaders have been threatened and some murdered. USAID has been working with semi-autonomous Community Councils in Tumaco and NAS coordinates eradication operations with the ADAM alternative development programs. Establishing civilian security is key to permitting social and economic development. The CSDI team is coordinating with the Army, Navy and Police with the goal of transitioning responsibilities from military to police -- a challenge because of limited police resources and numbers. NAS is providing scholarships for underrepresented populations to attend the state police academy, improve the image of the police, and allow more access to insecure areas.

Eradicating, Training, Nationalizing

¶16. (U) The USG and GOC are making significant inroads in confronting narcoterrorism in Colombia. The most recent U.S. figures for cocaine production in Colombia show a 24 percent reduction in production since the peak year 2001. In 2008, Colombian security forces set new records for interdiction and eradication, seizing 245 metric tons of cocaine and coca paste, eradicating 230,000 hectares of coca and destroying 3,667 drug labs. This joint effort kept hundreds of metric tons of drugs out of the United States. We have reduced the funds available to the FARC and other criminal groups to purchase of weapons and explosives, corrupt public officials and coerce local populations.

¶17. (U) The USG and GOC have made progress in eradication, as evidenced by a 25 percent decrease in potential cocaine productivity since the peak in 2001. Much of the success in confronting narcotrafficking and terrorism is due to air mobility

capabilities provided by the United States. Without helicopters, the GOC could not project force or provide government presence in a country the size of Texas and California combined. Colombia is nationalizing our aviation assets, but still needs some U.S. support. In the last two years, more than 50 aircraft have been turned over to the GOC to fund, maintain and control. Colombia's ability to confront narcotics and terrorism depends in large part on its air mobility.

Aiming for Irreversibility

¶18. (U) Our support to the Colombian military is based upon a three-phased approach. The first phase focused on building Colombian military forces, projecting those forces into ungoverned spaces and securing those spaces. It also supported offensive operations against illegal armed groups on an unprecedented scale. The second phase, currently being executed, focuses on securing, consolidating and sustaining those gains, increasing offensive operations against illegal armed groups, and ensuring the irreversibility of those gains. The third phase, to be initiated in 2011, will promote a strategic partnership to sustain key Colombian military capabilities.

¶19. (SBU) The MILGRP currently supports eight program areas: joint rotary wing, ground operations, riverine operations, governability, airpower, maritime interdiction, joint intelligence and communications, and joint force initiatives. Support to these programs is vital in both the short and long-terms. In the short-term, we will assist Colombia in controlling illegal armed groups and bringing peace and rule of law to the Colombian population. In the long-term, we will focus on building a strategic partnership with Colombia and developing key Colombian military capabilities that can support U.S. national security objectives worldwide.

Aiding Communities At Risk

¶20. (U) Under Plan Colombia, the USG has provided more than \$950 million in economic and social assistance via USAID. USAID's initiatives have delivered legal jobs, social services, and development in narcotrafficking and conflict zones. We are reintegrating thousands of Colombians who have demobilized, abating child recruitment into armed groups, and increasing social services for victims of conflict. We are restoring citizen confidence in governance, improving the criminal justice system and institutions, increasing the poor's access to justice, and promoting human rights through investigation and prosecution of human rights and labor-related cases. These programs focus on communities at high-risk of violence, provide legal and psycho-social assistance, and strengthen key government oversight and judicial institutions.

¶21. (U) USAID's alternative development program is a key component of our counternarcotics efforts. It promotes sustainable economic opportunities in regions vulnerable to drug production and conflict. These programs create jobs and economic opportunities in areas recently retaken from illegal armed groups and build the social infrastructure to mitigate future conflict. USAID is expanding social and economic opportunities and improving livelihoods for Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities disproportionately affected by conflict. These programs provide jobs, education, health care, housing, and social services for these vulnerable populations.

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